

“Own Time, Own TV”

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3-Year Future Project Proposal on:  
The Future of Television Distribution

[Written in 2007]

## **PROPOSAL**

### **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this proposal is to introduce a new media system that permits a global distribution of television content at the exact same time to subscribers all over the world. Television viewers would receive the latest episodes from current unfolding television series from the United States on their wirelessly connected computers or mobile phones equipped with the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS), 3G network or an equivalent satellite system. The implementation of this new project aims to unite television fans and audiences around the world by providing up-to-date episodes. It would also greatly reduce illegal downloading and sharing of content over the web. This system also serves to give television studios more accurate records of general viewership and popularity of any television series, effectively leading to a change in the way television industry functions; placing more importance on quality content rather than mediocre programmes supported by high commercial viability in the targeted demographics.

## **Features/Functionality**

Countless studies and observations in today's television industry point towards the remediation of content between one medium (such as television) and another (such as mobile phones). This proposal seeks to utilise the convergence of these two mediums, making use of satellite transmission technology instead of analog or cable-based transmission to distribute television content from the major television networks in the United States, such as ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX and The CW, to the rest of the world.

Television would be geographically limitless, literally reaching out to a global audience. The nature of distribution would mean that subscribers to the system would 'own' the content on their mobile phones or computers and have the option of watching it on their own time or on-the-go. Transmission of information to mobile phones will ride on the 3G (third-generation) network, while content will be broadcast to computers via wireless connectivity to satellites. The distributed material can also be interchangeable and transferable between the same user's authenticated devices (i.e. between mobile phone and computer). Apple has already begun selling television programmes, which can be transferred to iPods, at US\$1.99 via its online music store iTunes. (Vivian, p. 172) This method provides the user with mobility and flexibility, instead of restricting viewing methods to the home.

To overcome the problem of quantitative research figures (ratings) versus qualitative persuasions (critical acclaim and strong fan 'cult' following), the television industry needs to move away from the traditional method of tracking Nielsen ratings in selected household demographics. According to out-of-home TV industry professionals, "home-viewed advertisements were prone to the clutter effect because of the increasing number of ads appearing on TV", "viewer behaviours like 'zapping' (avoiding commercials with the remote control) made the home suddenly a site of profound uncertainty when it came to *knowing* advertising audiences" (McCarthy, p. 108). Studies have also found a majority of out-of-home viewers watching network television, indicating an importance for the industry to "quantify all television viewing, regardless of viewing location, and to track the viewing behaviour of these important demographic groups" (Layne, p. 1).

In order to fund the production costs of making television programmes, content for this service will be offered in two ways: users can either pay a nominal fee for commercial-free content, or choose to receive advertisement-laden content free-of-charge. The monetary receipts from the advertisers as well as the paying subscribers around the world would then contribute to funding the production costs.

As written by John Vivian, “television is well suited to become the hub of tomorrow’s mass communication” (p. 197), he goes on to state “We are in a dawning age of television portability and video on demand. For survival the old corporate titans of television must find new ways for doing business.” (p. 197)

## **User Description**

The targeted users for this project would be television watchers and fanatics who want to watch their television programmes at the same time it unravels in the United States, not weeks or months later. It is also meant for people who want the freedom and flexibility of choosing when and where to watch their programmes, instead of being restricted to the confines of a living room. This new system would allow people who are constantly on the move to keep up with current television offerings.

The following case studies provide statistics, which exhibit an increase in popularity for wireless downloading, computer, downloads and Internet video-on-demand. Cell-phone service provider Verizon offered snippets of multimedia content for subscribers in 2006, “Apple sold 8 million downloads of 40 different television series in the first six months” (Vivian, p. 180) for viewing on the video iPod.

With positive predictions from Informa, indicating “by 2010, 291 million people worldwide will use mobile video services” (Pfanner, 2005), along with this quotation from spokeswoman Alison Bonny, that “subscribers would be attracted to the familiarity of mobile television, in contrast to newfangled 3G services like video calling” (Pfanner, 2005), television studios and networks should buy into this lucrative proposal and move towards reinventing the lifestyles of television viewers with this new manner of television distribution.

## Illustration/Storyboard

The following images depict how content would be distributed out and how users would receive and view television on their mobile devices.

1b: Satellite sends feed directly to handset

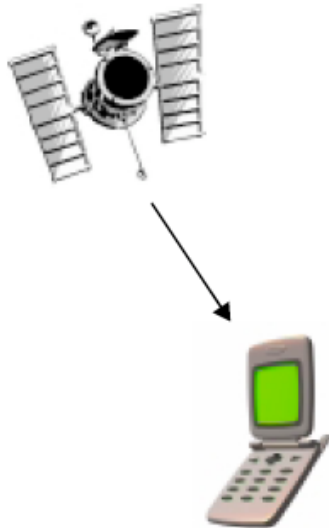


Figure 1: Transmission of content to mobile. Figure 2: Example of YouTube content on iPhone.

Figure 1: Texas Instruments: Digital Broadcast TV:

<http://focus.ti.com/general/docs/wtbu/wtbugencontent.tsp?contentId=4445&navigationId=12499&templateId=6123>

Figure 2: <http://www.apple.com/iphone/features/index.html#youtube>



Figure 3: Sports content on mobile. Figure 4: Variety programming on mobile.

Figure 3: <http://www.mobilemonday.com.ua/news/mobile-fernsehen.html>

Figure 4: <http://wirelesswatch.jp/category/video-programs/page/3/>

## **JUSTIFICATION**

### **Key Issues/Ideas influencing the project**

The key issues investigated in my research involve the demise and pre-mature cancellations of many critically lauded, but ratings-starved television programmes in the North American market. This is resonant in Karl Marx's key idea of *relations of production*, whereby distinction is drawn between "capitalist (media conglomerates and advertising companies) and wage slave (public viewer)" (Inglis, p. 20). Quality television programmes have been given less attention and exposure compared to mediocre entertainment that is determined more commercially lucrative for selected demographics. Therefore, my proposal aims to establish a service whereby global audience numbers are recorded, through a system that uses a subscription method to significantly reduce any inaccuracies measured, drawing relation to the previously mentioned viewer behaviour known as 'zapping' (McCarthy, p. 108) in the current ratings system.

As summarised by Jonathan Bignell, "The measurement of audiences and prediction of how they respond to television are important to television institutions' economic success and the planning of programmes." (p. 274) This statement supports the claim that "Schedulers are working for the interests of the broadcasting channel for which they work, and not for the producers of individual programmes" (p. 271), leading to the placement of a 'quality' programme in a less desired timeslot. With this strategy employed in the competitive ratings battle between the networks, "the need to keep a number of audiences on board means that crime series must have a romantic subplot to attract different segments of the audience" (Wedell & Luckham, p. 213), greatly compromising the artistic talents by restricting the flow of creativity in producing a network television programme.

This proposed project relates to the media theory of *technological determinism*, the *uses and gratifications model*, as well as Michel de Certeau's observation on *popular consumption in media audiences*. The introduction of 'Own Time, Own TV' to the rest of the world would effectively construct a brand-new method of watching television for many, and a new lifestyle for some. McKenzie and

Wajcman write, “technologies can be designed, consciously or unconsciously, to open certain social options and close others” (p. 4), supporting the notion that “*technological determinism* is partly right as a theory of society” in that “technology matters not just physically and biologically, but also to our human relations to each other” (p. 5), further proclaiming the reality of “technology and society (being) mutually constitutive.” (p. 23)

Drawing relation to the *uses and gratifications model*, the Media Student’s Book writes, “Power is argued to lie with the individual consumer of media, who is argued to consciously use TV, the internet, etc. to gratify certain needs and interests.” (Branston & Stafford, p. 276) Television is a medium that so far has been driven by numbers. The people should have the power to control what is available for them to watch, instead of purely being a commodity that is sold to advertisers for the advertising dollar. Hence, the implementation of this new product would greatly shift the power into the consumers’ hands, exemplifying Michel de Certeau’s notion that “ordinary people can use their *consumption practices to destabilise capitalist processes*”. (Lewis, p. 251)

The growing reliance of humans on technology is evident in today’s society. Hence, the belief that “the development of new technologies is a ‘given’, pre-ordained by progress, science, and modernity” (Flew, p. 21) is resonant in the implementation of this project. The audience’s continually growing authority and influence on the television industry proves that “media consumers are seen as active users of communication technologies rather than passive receivers of content” (Bucy, p. 59), and that the power of the active audience should be respected not underestimated.



## **The reasons for choosing this approach**

The trend of audiences shifting away from the traditional uses of television, towards new media habits like internet video streaming, downloading video content for mobile phones and receiving satellite transmissions, draws speculation on “a permanent withdrawal from the plateau of viewing in the heyday of network television” (Wedell & Luckham, p. 107) the television industry has to keep up with the technological advances by incorporating new methods of distributing television content.

Some television networks have already begun to move away from lingering in the ‘broadcast’ world, and have started on reinventing themselves by penetrating the ‘networked’ world of driven by interaction. The following examples of “Disney making deals to sell episodes of Desperate Housewives on a video iPod, NBC making deals with iTunes for downloads, CBS making deals with Comcast for video on demand” (Carter, p. 387), all dictate how these media conglomerates are working to retain and gain their respective shares of the market.

As audiences continue to seek television programmes on different platforms, timeslots and ratings start to fade into obscurity and “the power of television schedulers to control when audiences watch programmes is correspondingly diminished, and, in effect, television viewers become schedulers themselves.” (Bignell, p. 267) Hence, this proposal seeks to take advantage of timeslot-free programming on a global scale. The number of subscriptions for any particular programme, garnered worldwide, will attest to the ‘ratings’ factor within this context. This will pave the way for more accurate results and a better depiction of what viewers really want to watch.

The rise of mobile phone use has been a major contributor to new media creations. The case study researching mobile phone technologies found in The Media Student’s Book dictates “the convergence of technologies and organisations which exploit them in combined telecommunications and media industries, phone use as an integral part of certain media texts and new media products – streaming video, ringtones, etc.” (Branston & Stafford, p. 355)

To conclude, the combination of mobile phone technology along with global television distribution would create a technological invention on the verge of new frontier. As written in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, “New technology typically emerges not from flashes of disembodied inspiration but from existing technology by a process of gradual change to, and new combinations of, that existing technology.” (McKenzie & Wajcman, p. 9)

### **Shortcomings of this proposal**

A premature barrier this project has to overcome would be to convince all the major television networks in the United States to buy into this endeavour, and to be able to guarantee a solid collaboration with a telecommunications company for the provision and use of the broadcasting satellite technology. The involvement of the major television studios and networks would resolve copyright issues.

The enormity of this venture would call upon a strong army of technological equipment in order to run smoothly. With its success heavily reliant on technological factors, this idea embodies the view that “the compelling nature of much technological change is best explained by seeing technology not as outside of society, as some versions of *technological determinism* would have it, but as inextricably part of society” (McKenzie & Wajcman, p. 12).

The adequate technological power needed to drive this project to fruition would also depend on the financial capabilities of all the parties involved, including the television studios, networks, advertising buyers, telecommunication companies and the average audience on the receiving end. Fortunately, with the rate of technological advancements today, the technical aptitude required should well be in motion three years from now.

## **List of works cited in this proposal**

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## Images used in proposal

Figure 1: Transmission of content to mobile. Retrieved on October 16, 2007 from  
Texas Instruments: Digital Broadcast TV:

[http://focus.ti.com/general/docs/wtbu/wtbugencontent.tsp?contentId=4445&navigatio  
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